# MJP (or, if you prefer, MPJ)

It is easy to believe that, for the foreseeable future, Mutual Judge Preferences are here to stay in LD and Policy. No doubt there are also those who would like to see prefs in PF, but given the nature of the PF judging pool, that is, the large number of parents who come and go quickly, that’s probably not going to happen, or when it does, it will be end of PF as we now know it.

Tournaments do not have to use MJP. It is the Tournament Director’s decision. There’s not much question about using it at circuit tournaments, but you should ask yourself, if your tournament is not at the circuit level, if it’s right for you. Keep in mind that part of public speaking education is learning to address any and all audiences. Look at whether your tournament is primarily educational or competitive? Obviously MJP makes no sense at a novice scrimmage, but where do you draw the line? If you expect your field to be young, attending your tournament for experience, probably MJP is out. If your tournament is entirely regional, and MJP is only marginally accepted in your area, why rock the boat? Obviously, the call is easier to make in some circumstances than others, but make sure it makes sense for your event.

In any case, MJP is here to stay at any circuit tournament and plenty of others as well, and if your customers—the people you want to attend your event—expect it, you need to offer it. But do it right. There is nothing about it that is etched in stone, and using tabroom.com you can mold it a hundred different ways to Sunday. But that doesn’t mean you should.

**Priorities:** First of all, you need to decide how preferences will be applied, and to let your participants know that decision. For six tiers, the standard order is

1-1, 2-2, 3-3, 2-3, 1-2, 4-4, 5-5, with a concentration on the bubbles

Loosely translated, that means that in every round, the people who can not reach elimination rounds if they don’t win this round, i.e., the bubble—usually the down-2 bracket—get priority on the prefs. They should get 1s. Then the down-1s get second priority. And so forth.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Note that 2-3 takes precedence over 1-2 pairings. The point of this is that, in a round where the prefs aren’t equal, we shouldn’t default to someone getting a top 1, when that no-longer mutual judge could be at the bottom of the opponent’s 2s. Granted, the spread is potentially no different in a 2-3 pairing, but at least in that pairing you’re not debating in front of your opponent’s 1.

**Tiers:** Unless your pool of judges is bigger than the population of Cleveland, it is recommended that you use 6 tiers of prefs, which is 5 rankings of usable judges and 1 ranking of strikes. Conflicts are handled separately. Using 9 tiers is tempting because it is mathematically more satisfying—ditto using ordinals, for that matter—but there are a couple of good reasons not to. First of all, your customer base is used to 6 tiers at most tournaments. It is never a good idea to overtax the users of a system. They’ve done 6 tiers their entire career. Now at your tournament they have 9 tiers. Judge Joe Fonebone, who is always one of their 3s out of 6, now has to be translated to a scale of 9, as does every other judge on their list. It’s just not good system management on your part to ask them to do this. Even if they understand that this makes smaller tiers, and therefore mutual preferences that are in fact more mutual, they will be unhappy at having to do all the work you demanded of them.

The second reason to use 6 tiers is because it will guarantee a greater number of mutual rounds than 9 tiers. You can do this math until the cows come home, but the point is undeniable: the larger the number of tiers, the greater the number of non-mutual assignments. So yes, a 2-3 is better in 9 tiers than a 2-3 in 6 tiers, but a 2-2 in 6 is better than a 2-3 in 9, and when you have 9, your chances increase of having a 2-3 rather than a 2-2 (or whatever uneven vs. even match). If you have 100+ judges fully obligated, 9 is probably fine. But I’m guessing you don’t have anything like that.

**Fairly real example:** Let’s say you have 44 judges. 44 judges means 4 strikes which means 40 judges to rank. That’s 5 of each ranking in 6 tiers equaling a range of 8, or 8 of each ranking in 9 tiers equaling range of 5. Since you increase the number of non-mutual rankings—if each ranking is smaller, you have fewer judges to match in a given tier to your opponent—you increase the possibility of a span of 10 in an off-match, versus 8 in an on match.

The only time 9 tiers benefits you mathematically is when your match is mutual, but you are setting up for fewer mutual matches, and therefore potentially worsening the spread of preference. I maintain that the fact that 9 is not the norm, and the math is, at best, dicey, stick to the norm.

(By the way, all of this assumes that the judges will perform according to some predetermined, knowable criteria, and that you can therefore numerically rank them in terms of favorability. If you believe that is true, there are bridges for sale at the end of this essay. Sometimes it seems that we overburden the quantitative analysis of a fairly unquantifiable system.)

**Tier Ranges:** My recommendation is that you use even tiers, aside from strikes. Going with 6 tiers, as I know you will, that means 17%, 17%, 17%, 17%, 17%, 10%.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Yes, you can adjust the tiers however you want. For instance, you can do uneven tiers like 25, 25, 20, 10, 10, 10. This would certainly result in your debaters getting more 1s, but they’re not *real* 1s. You’re not fooling anybody. And by increasing the sizes of the tiers you’re only artificially increasing the likelihood of mutuality, and you’re still not fooling anybody. Whatever you do, it will be readily apparent to your registrants when they fill out their prefs. I say, make them happy. Stick to the norms.

**Going off prefs:** Try to give decent prefs in the rounds to ALL your customers. That is, when assigning judges during prelims, don’t forego prefs completely for teams who cannot break into elims. Yes, there is a good Rawlsian argument for preffing highest to bubble and those still in, and no doubt your attendees all accept it, but there is no good argument for dropping prefs completely for out-of-competition folks. After all, ALL your customers have paid to be there. You are still obligated to give them the most decent judging you can.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**Tabroom isn’t perfect:** Tabroom will do its best to find mutuality (although there are controls beyond just that, e.g., prioritizing hired judges). One of the jobs of the tab room is to check every non-mutual pairing. They can often be improved. Tabroom gets you 95% there. Your tab room people get you that last 5 %.

This is especially true in break rounds. A 1-1-5 and 1-3-3 may both add up to 7, but two 1s can be powerfully different than one 1. There’s fair and then there’s fair.

**The Issue of the Forgotten Judge:** In an MPJ world, about a third of the pool sits around a lot. On the one hand, the fields rank the majority of the judges more or less the same. Some judges are simply more popular than others. On top of that, most teams expect to get assigned judges between 1 and 3, and consider 4s and 5s an abomination before God. In other words, there is a tacit expectation of striking a third of the field (although few if any coaches will admit this). The problem is, at a big tournament with lots of LD judges, the bottom preffed people get few or no rounds, no matter how you slice it. Preffing has the undesired result of creating a tier of second-class judge citizens. These are usually parents or unpopular coaches who, when they finally do get a round, will be judging a couple of down-5s. It is recommended that, if you have the numbers, you offer to move them to PF. They’ll be useful because they’ll get rounds, and they’ll mostly be happy because they’re not turning moldy sitting all by themselves in your judge lounge. Make sure that you get, and keep, them preffed in LD. One never knows…

# Strikes

Every division in a tournament should probably get some strikes. Maybe not at a

first-timer novice divisions, but just about anywhere else. Everybody has that couple

of judges they can’t pick up come hell or high water. Why not give them a break?

This is especially true of PF. There are still plenty of people who do not believe in

strikes in PF. So be it. They don’t have to use them. But you should offer them.

Remember, the tournament is not you dictating the way you think the world should

be. The tournament is you being sensitive to the desires of your customers. Give

them the choice.

Will PF ever move into MJP? Probably not. What defines PF is its oratorical side, and

the fact that the judges are often parents. It makes for what we might call a less

“professional” debate, but it is also the most popular debate in the country. You think there might be a connection? It’s the parents that keep it honest. Lose them, and PF will be just one more disappearing star on the horizon.

The number of strikes you should offer is variable, but make it count. The bigger the

event, the more you can allow. Think between 5-10% of the pool.

# Conflicts

Conflicts are handled separately from strikes or MJP rankings. (Or they should be.)

Conflicts are the way we handle the judges who love you too much. (We already

have prefs and strikes for the ones that hate you too much.) Conflicts are the people you work for or with, whose teams you travel with, who have privately coached you, etc. We have a thorough description and a comprehensive list of examples elsewhere on this page.

You need to make it clear how your are handling conflicts. Alert everyone before the

tournament; send out our document to clarify it for them. Use that line: “the judges who love you too much.” And you need to propose and enforce penalties, up to and including disqualification. We have seen incredible abuses. There are people out there who will try to hide a favorable relationship, or put in a conflict because they want to bar a judge with whom no conceivable conflict exists, except they do not want to be judged by that person and they don’t want to “waste” a strike. In tabroom, folks can put in a conflict that will travel from tournament to tournament. You need to take care about this.

1. The natural result of this, when you think about it, is that the debaters with the best records, the undefeateds, are the least likely to get their mutual 1s. This plays out in real life. But the reason these debaters are undefeated is because they’re good, and they can pick up ballots from a variety of judges. At the point where coaches forget to train their students to succeed in front of every kind of judge, the coaches are failing to do their jobs. MJP does not insure lots of 1s and 2s. It only insures equal preferences. It could be an equal 5. But you still want to win the round, and will work accordingly. If you don’t, your opponent will. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 18% looks better on paper, but Chris Palmer claims that 17 works better in real life. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Just as a point of information, if you’re doing per-round obligations for your judges, then your out-of-its are not only getting their personal dregs, they’re probably unlikely to even be mutual dregs. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)